

# 10 Tips for Project Management Prosperity

When it comes to **project management**, there are many challenges to keep each project on track and within budget. There are several factors to consider, as well as internal and external elements that may cause a project to derail. However, by taking a few precautions and having an excellent plan in place, you can lead your project to success. Here are 10 project management tips and tricks to help ensure your project will move along smoothly:

## Tip 1: Nail Down Project Details

Before you ever start the project, make sure that it is based on a solid foundation and that you have the buy-in from all key stakeholders. Understand their interests and expectations and be aware of how they will determine whether or not the project is successful. You will also need to ensure that the project scope is distinctly identified, including the roles and responsibilities of the various project team members. Develop the project plan and verify that the goals of the key elements are clearly defined and closely aligned. You should also establish measurable and trackable success criteria, including accomplishing tasks on schedule, achieving budget targets, confirming product functionality is satisfactory to the customer, and ensuring government and/or industry regulations are met. Take care of all the details to lay the groundwork for your project's success.

## Tip 2: Identify Project and Team Requirements

Once you have a strong plan in place, you can start implementing it by assembling an effective project team. As noted in an article released by ITToolkit.com, "The project team is a working unit of individual parts, sharing a common goal, achieved through the structured application of combined skills." The article also states that, "The first step to team success begins with initial organization: to assemble and organize available resources capable of working together as a whole through the integration of individual skills, talents and personalities." As a project manager, you'll need to align those skills, talents and personalities with the appropriate project needs. Make sure that each individual working on the project is clear about their task and what they are providing upon completion.

## Tip 3: Be the Project Leader

A key role in project management is the project leader. In this position, you will need to cultivate good and positive team dynamics and act as a coach and/or mentor to all team members. You will also be the leader when it comes to getting input from the project team and major stakeholders, as well as getting their buy-in. As a project leader, you are essentially the captain of the ship. That means you will need to ascertain the rough waters that may be ahead. In addition, you will need to inspire your team to follow you through the turbulent times, as well as the calm times. If you don't have effective leadership skills, you may not be able to prevail over the challenges facing your project. Take the helm and lead your team to success.

## Tip 4: Define Critical Project Milestones

Identify defining moments throughout the project. You can provide a life cycle of the project by including the four main phases: initiation, planning, execution and closure. Perform a real evaluation at the end of each phase. Make sure to examine every deliverable. From parts of the product to the technical documents to the project plan, you will need all of the elements involved to ensure the product is meeting the project specifications. The product needs to be aligned with the quality your customers are expecting. These

milestones will not only help you to eliminate project risk and monitor project change, but will also alert you to any continuing problems and ensure that each piece is correctly completed.

### **Tip 5: Keep the Communication Lines Open**

One of the most critical steps in the project management process is to ensure that the communication lines are open. As the project manager, you will need to be the operator of this communications system. Keep a communications plan and stick with it. Throughout the entire project, communication should be consistent, open, honest and clear. Make sure you keep in touch with all key stakeholders and team members during the project process. Ensure that everyone has the information necessary to make decisions and proceed with the project. You can also keep everyone on the same page by creating status reports based upon the project information and updates.

### **Tip 6: Attain Pertinent Documentation**

From the initiation of the project to the milestones along the way, you should have documentation signed by the stakeholders. A recent ConnectITNews.com article, recommended to “Make sure all documentation is in-line with your project management methodology of choice to ensure your project team is covered in terms of deliverables, and expectations.” Even with the best project management processes in place, it is not often that a project is completed on time and within budget, so you will need to have the appropriate documentation ready for the stakeholders and plan for any unforeseen events. However, you don’t want to overcomplicate the project management process with too much documentation that doesn’t add value to the project.

### **Tip 7: Manage Project Risks**

There can be risk at any time during the project. Your project management experience with similar projects can help guide you so that you may be able to foresee when risk is imminent and when corrective action needs to be taken. By having open communication, you should be able to understand what, if any, risks are approaching and manage them before they get out of hand. You will need to identify and control project risks before they control you. Since a risk is only a potential problem, you want to take care of it before it becomes an actual problem. As one of the most imperative best practices in the project management process, risk management is essential to project success.

### **Tip 8: Avoid Scope Creep**

Managing scope creep in project management is another essential element to project success. Although some change is inevitable in any project situation, you will want to keep your project from creeping into chaos. In general, scope creep happens when new elements are added to a project that’s already been approved, but no consideration is given to increasing the budget, adding more time to the schedule and/or adding more resources to compensate for the revised project. If the project’s scope does need to be revisited, you can participate in the rescoping process. Make sure to have the proper documentation and have all stakeholders sign off on these changes before proceeding.

## **Tip 9: Test Deliverables**

Deliverables should be tested at every critical milestone and the final product must meet the project requirements. Before moving on to the next phase of the project, you need to be sure that the product is coming along as planned. An ITToolkit.com article states that, “As a project evolves, various types of deliverables are produced to support project continuation, to measure progress, and to validate plans and assumptions ... Results are expected and must be delivered at every stage of the project lifecycle.” At the end of the project, the deliverable must meet or exceed the customer expectations to be considered a success. The final phase of the project is closure. This grand finale is a sign of achievement for you as a project manager, as well as the rest of your team and stakeholders. Once the project is complete and the customer is happy, your mission is complete.

## **Tip 10: Evaluate the Project**

What lessons have you learned along your project management process? Each project can be a valuable learning tool. You will want to review the project as a whole, as well as analyze various project components. What were the project victories? Where were there project disappointments? Make informed conclusions about the project’s quality and the product’s performance. Compare the planned return on investment (ROI) to the actual ROI as one way to understand the level of your success. You can use the lessons learned from each project to minimize future failures and maximize future successes.